New Fiction

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comes to be very fond of her stolid, middle aged husband, and the birth of her son binds them in a real union. She is as yet untouched by passion; she does not love the sedate, kindly Mr. Mepsted, but she does not dislike him, and she is genuinely distressed when he dies, having overworked himself during the war. But marriage has been no real escape; she is still hemmed in by the taboos of middle class convention.

She conceives that money may show a way out, so she sets to work to earn a fortune, and succeeds, extraordinarily but with entire plausibility. This section of the book also gives Mr. Jeffery a chance to bring in more "comic relief," which at one point is almost farcical, but cleverly done. At this point, too, Emily feels the force of what she at first believes to be love, but

Amelia Josephine Burr, Author of "Three Fires."

which turns out to be a mere passionate interlude. Here again Mr. Jeffery is not at all doing the usual thing. It is a tense, dramatic passage, but not overplayed. Finally she encounters the real hero and the avenue of escape in the very old fashioned way of a true marriage, based upon sacrifice and respect and high ideals, as well as upon passion.

It is a substantial book—a curious mingling of the most up to date frankness and progressive ideals with those that still give promise of being everlasting—love and "service" combined in a thoroughly modern setting. The manner of it is excellent and all its characters are well conceived. It is a moving story, and its moral, if it has one, is the value of sanity, using the word in its widest possible sense.

RIDERS UP. By Gerald Beaumont. D. Appleton & Co.

WHATEVER the defects of the American literary method may be, it has produced stories of sport of a quantity that no other country has equaled and of a quality that no other country has excelled. With the exception of Conan Doyle, where is there a living Englishman who has written tales of the prize ring to compare with those of Jack London, Albert Payson Terhune or Charles Van Loan? Can English fiction show better tales of the links than the best of Van Loan's golf stories, or Owen Johnson's "Even Threes"? Of course the baseball story is entirely American; and American football is so far different in spirit and surroundings from English football that any comparison would be manifestly narrow. But the race track is much the same in both countries, and with all England's turf tradition, that there is in the British Empire a book of the hour dealing with the sport of kings that provides more thrills than Gerald Beaumont's "Riders Up" is very much to be doubted.

Mr. Beaumont's baseball stories were not, strictly speaking, first class. They gave the impression of being mechanically builded and they lacked what may be defined vaguely as quality. But these tales of the race track in "Riders Up" represent a long stride forward. They are not merely good stories; they are exceptionally good stories; and with them Mr. Beaumont steps into the first rank among American writers of sport fiction of the day. Here, of course, is no new plot or situation; for no such plot or situation exists. But having learned his trade, Mr. Beaumont gives the impression of novelty, which is all that the most exacting reader can ask. Spirited tales that stir the blood and fire the imagination. It is difficult to select any one or two or three for particular mention. Perhaps as good as any of the rest are "Thoroughbreds" and "The Empty Stall," and "Star of Israel," the last named conveying a curious suggestion of the famous chariot race of Gen. Lew Wallace's "Ben-Hur."

BEVERLY STARK.

THE THREE FIRES. By Amelia Josephine Burr. New York: Macmillan Company.

A VIVID, dramatic story of native love and vengeance, in the exotic setting of the "wild green heart of Ceylon." It concerns chiefly Motu Rayen, the crippled Tamil foreman of the Hamilton cacao plantation; Nila, child of his best friend Vyapuri, a flowerlike Hindu girl, maturing with the early precocity of the tropics; and Tuan Noor, of the native Ceylon police, a "magnificent, wild creature, with a body lithe and powerful as a black panther." Motu Rayen is bent and misshapen "as if a giant had crumpled his body in cruel play"; yet a few years back he too was a magnificent creature, and his injuries came through loyally saving the life of his master, the Englishman Hamilton. And Vyapuri, knowing the bigness of his heart, asks no better husband for Nila. But the girl, unknown to her people, has met Tuan Noor in the forest and given her heart to him unaware that he is a Moslem and that union with him would mean "the desecration of all that she and those before her held sacred." So when she learns the truth, like a dutiful Hindu maiden she silences her heart, obeys her father and accepts the crippled Motu Rayen for a husband.

Tuan Noor swears vengeance. He forewarns Nila that within two years she will suffer a Hindu wife's supreme tragedy, the loss of her *thali* or wedding necklace, thus becoming "refuse of the world, one whose life offering the gods have disdained." How Tuan Noor makes good his threat and how in spite of it he misses the joy of vengeance is the theme which occupies the greater part of this story; and its telling reveals a minute understanding of local tribal customs and of the psychology of an alien people that would be sufficient in itself to give the volume distinction quite aside from the novelty, dramatic tensity and high ideals of the plot.

FIELDING SARGENT. By Elsa Barker. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE Freudian novel was bound to come sooner or later, and in "Fielding Sargent" we have a pretty thorough and conscientious specimen of the type. At the opening of the story we find Sargent alone at 1 A. M., a prey to morbid and unreasoning terror. He is a man in the prime of life, a successful man who has made himself a name and built up an ample fortune. But since his wife died a year ago he has retired from business, become a recluse, and has begun to imagine things—queer, unreasonable, unwholesome things. He hears strange noises, stealthy, intermittent scratchings at the door. His wife is, of course, quite dead—and yet, those scratchings—who else could it be if not his wife? She hated him while alive; perhaps she had reason to—there were things in the past that he could not, would not remember. God knows he never meant to harm her—yet, although she had been safely buried for a year, who could tell if even yet some one might not accuse him of her death?

Nights of mental agony drive Sargent to his doctor, and the latter, recognizing that here is a clear case of a mind disease, sends him promptly to the foremost psychoanalyst in the country. The latter proceeds to delve into Sargent's dreams; and the startling, paradoxical and reprehensible interpretations that he gives to those dreams fill 319 closely printed pages. It must be conceded that if such material is to be made into fiction at all one could hardly hope for a more skillful adaptation of it. Far from being boresome the whole thing is distinctly entertaining, regardless of the degree of seriousness with which you may happen to take the whole Freudian doctrine, while the reader who has never before given the matter a thought gets at least a pretty good general idea of Freud's theories and methods. Naturally, a novelist has a big advantage over a psychoanalyst in real life in being at liberty to invent dreams to fit desired conditions and then interpret them so as to make them dovetail like a Chinese puzzle. In a certain sense, it amounts to playing the game with stacked cards. But that is a criticism which applies with equal force to other branches of fiction, and especially to detective stories. And, so long as we regard a book like "Fielding Sargent" as being in the same category as a good detective story, and not as a contribution to science, let us by all means be grateful to it for whatever modicum of entertainment it may afford us.

THE LOVE LEGEND. By Woodward Boyd. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE authoress of this confesses that she wrote stories in imitation of "The Wizard of Oz" when she was but eight years old, but she does not say whether the inspiration came from the book or the more direct and perfect stimulus of Fred Stone's marvelous, jointless legs. But one traces a reminiscent something of it in this admirable novel. "Our house is all bent up!" said the little girl in the play after the cyclone had hung the house over a fence, but she did not seem to mind. Some such cyclone has swept through Miss Boyd's book, and pretty nearly everything her trenchant pen touches collapses like a bubble or is "all bent up." It is a path of destruction, and though she—that is, the heroine—is pretty badly mauled the last page leaves her not minding it very much.

The book is a literary debut that calls for a most hearty welcome. It is a fine performance, and for once the publisher's assertion that she is "among the handful who can understand and reveal American society as it is to-day" is not a mere "blurb." A remarkable handful of youngsters it is, too, to whom we must now add this young woman. The young generation has taken to expounding itself eloquently. One thing is plain, here as in other recent books of similar tone, and that is that the young people are sternly at war with much that the parents used to stand for; and they make out a case. Perhaps the wiser old folks should answer: "All right, children; we *have* made a mess of it. Go to it; the world is yours anyhow. Let's see what you can make of it—and God bless you!"

The old fallacy which the winds of her story blow away is that of the possibility of a Prince Charming who is sure to turn

Alexander Woollcott—Mr. Woollcott's "Shouts and Murmurs" and "Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play" were discussed in last week's issue of the Book Section.

up if the girl is only good and patient, and sweet and sentimental. It is exploded in four sections, in the lives of four girls who grew up in Chicago and who had small relish for humbug of any kind. "Oh, mother," says Dizzy, brutally; "don't pull that old stuff. * * * I know when my intellectual capacity is greater than that of the person I am talking with."

Miss Boyd hasn't much patience with the mother of her heroines, whose four love stories she treats in four sections of the book. In fact she has small tolerance for most of her characters. They all displease her, somehow, however they react to the "love legend" in the belief in which their sentimental mother has brought them up. She seems, nevertheless, to have some hope for Sari and her little Jew husband, who never were "dupes," but married without sentimentality and had a good deal of trouble, but appear to be scheduled for better luck. As to Ward, the leading heroine, who believed hardest in the love legend, one is surprised, after over three hundred pages devoted to destroying that legend, to find her still clinging to it. "Perhaps, in time to come, some other man * * * the love legend, like life, is deathless." The outcome is still a little unsure—which is as it probably must be.

The humor of the book, though often sharp, is also often tender, as in the description of the poor old maid, Olive. Perhaps the portrait of the mother is a bit cruel, but, then, some mothers are like that. And the children of to-day will no longer "stand for" it.

THE STRANGE ATTRACTION. By Jane Mander. Dodd, Mead & Co.

THERE is nothing strange about the attraction of Jane Mander's work, for its appeal is clear, direct and vigorous. It has a fresh vitality, what might be called a sophisticated youngness, and almost an exuberance about it that may be due, in some measure, to the fact that she is a product of New Zealand, that newest fairyland of British adventure. There is no lack of experience behind it; it has nothing of the vain imaginings about life as viewed by an intelligent spinster, or "lady novelist," but one feels that Miss Mander must be incorrigibly young despite her accurate knowledge of human nature. And she is a highly competent artist, as her earlier work demonstrated.

The strange attraction of the hero of this, Dane Barrington, was partly physical; he was a "beauty," of the romantic type, though not at all effeminate. He was also a thinker, a creative artist and endowed with a surplusage of temperament. The attraction of the heroine, Valerie, lay in her intense vitality and her aversion to the conventional. She is emphatically "not like other girls" and re-

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